

# UUX Design Quotes

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These design quotes were gathered on a usability discussion list.

## Designers on Design

A designer knows that he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away - Antoine de St-Expurey

The public is more familiar with bad design than good design. It is, in effect, conditioned to prefer bad design, because that is what it lives with. The new becomes threatening, the old reassuring. - Paul Rand (Design, Form, and Chaos)

We are searching for some kind of harmony between two intangibles: a form which we have not yet designed and a context which we cannot properly describe. - Christopher Alexander's Notes On The Synthesis Of Form concerning the design process.

Form follows function-that has been misunderstood. Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union. - Frank Lloyd Wright

However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results. – Winston Churchill

When I'm working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong. - R. Buckminster Fuller

Questions about whether design is necessary or affordable are quite beside the point: design is inevitable. The alternative to good design is bad design, not no design at all. Everyone makes design decisions all the time without realizing it, like Moliere's M. Jourdain who discovered he had been speaking prose all his life, and good design is simply the result of making these decisions consciously, at the right stage, and in consultation with others as the need arise - Douglas Martin (Book Design)

The details are not the details. They make the design. - Charles Eames

The lyf so sort, the craft so long to lerne. - Geoffrey Chaucer

To err is human, to forgive, design. - Andrew Dillon

You can design for all of the people some of the time. You can design for some of the people all of the time. But you can't design for all of the people all of the time. - William Hudson with apologies to Abraham Lincoln

You can't get the experience of a good steak dinner through a nipple - you have to create a totally different, yet compelling experience. - Jon Meads

You need to "listen deeply" - listen past what people say, you want to hear what they need. - Jon Meads

It's better to design the user experience than rectify it. It's the difference between a cathedral and the Winchester House. - Jon Meads

If there's a 'trick' to it, the UI is broken. - Douglas Anderson

Things that look different should act different. Things that look the same should act the same. - Larry Marine (Design without the ego).

In theory, theory and practice are the same, but in practice, they're not.

"If I can see it, it's a failure" - Bill Buxton

"We will go into your houses and redesign them the same way your web sites are designed. The basement will be the first thing you see, the kitchen will be unreachable except through the bedroom and both bathrooms, the bedroom will be on six different floors, and the dog will be in every room at once." - Ann Feeny, Information Architect's Manifesto

## Discovery and Invention

...you'll never have all the information you need to make a decision. If you did, it would be a foregone conclusion, not a decision - David Mahoney

I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work. - Thomas Edison

For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for Nature cannot be fooled. - Richard Feynman

Hell, there are no rules here - we're trying to accomplish something. - Thomas Edison

I believe that a scientist looking at nonscientific problems is just as dumb as the next guy. - Richard Feynman

Just because it isn't done doesn't mean it can't be done. Just because it can be done doesn't mean it should be - Barry Glasford

Nothing is impossible for the man who doesn't have to do it himself - A. H. Weiler

People's behavior makes sense if you think about it in terms of their goals, needs, and motives. - Thomas Mann

Always listen to the experts. They will tell you what can't be done, and why. Then do it. - Robert A. Heinlein

Rigorous reasoning from inapplicable assumptions yields the world's most durable nonsense.

For every piece of durable nonsense, there is an irrelevant frame of reference in which it makes perfect sense.

"We've all heard that a million monkeys banging on a million typewriters will eventually reproduce the entire works of Shakespeare. Now, thanks to the Internet, we know this is not true." - Robert Wilensky

## Simplicity, Consistency and Other Hobgoblins

Complexity is the Problem; Ease of Use is the Solution; Productivity is the Impact - an executive of a large computer firm, (quoted in Kelley, John Falk, "Natural Language and computers: six empirical steps for writing an easy-to-use computer application", University Microfilms International #8321592, 1983)

For every problem, there is one solution which is simple, neat and wrong. - H. L. Mencken

Don't make me think - Steve Krug

Easy is Hard - Peter Lewis, NY Times

Every time we get it idiot-proofed, Ma Nature produces cleverer idiots. – Robin Kinkead

I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity. - Oliver Wendell Holmes

Make it as simple as possible. But no simpler. - Albert Einstein

The best journey is the one with the fewest steps. Shorten the distance between the user and the goal.

The main thing is that everything becomes simple, easy enough for a child to understand; that each act be ordered, that good and evil be decided arbitrarily, thus clearly. - Albert Camus

There are two ways of constructing a software design: one way is to make it so simple that there are obviously no deficiencies, and the other way is to make it so complicated that there are no obvious deficiencies. The first method is far more difficult. - C.A.R. Hoare

It's easy to make things difficult, but it's difficult to make things easy.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Consistency requires you to be as ignorant today as you were a year ago. – Bernard Berenson

Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly - Dali Lama

## Users

Know thy user, and YOU are not thy user.

If the user can't use it, it doesn't work. - Susan Dray

If something is hard to use, I just don't use it as much. - Melanie Sokol, quoted in Steve Krug's "Don't Make Me Think"

Those who cannot tell what they desire or expect, still sigh and struggle with indefinite thoughts and vast wishes. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

We see what we look for, not what we look at - Ulrich Neisser (paraphrase)

...pay attention to what users do, not what they say. - Jakob Nielsen

...This is so simple a five-year-old child could understand it. "Quick, run out and bring me a five-year-old child." - Groucho Marx

Users don't know what they want, and users can't always say what they know.

It is impossible to design anything that is foolproof because fools are so ingenious

To err is human, to admit having erred is not human.

If I made an error, at least let me finish my thought before I have to fix it.

If the user can't find it, it doesn't exist - HFI button

Even experts are novices at some point.

The user is NOT a lower life form - Ken Becker

Whadya mean, they're not all computer scientists?

## Communication and Design

A picture is worth a thousand words and that's the problem!

A picture is worth a thousand words, but it will take longer to download.

A picture is worth a thousand words, unless of course, you're talking about a picture of a thousand words.

For any given thousand words, it's hard to come up with a picture - Yuri Englehart

It takes less time to do a thing right than to explain why you did it wrong. - H.W. Longfellow

There is no urge so great as for one man to edit another man's work - Mark Twain

When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt - Henry J. Kaiser

What you do speaks so clearly that I don't have to hear what you say. - Chuck Knox (Seattle Seahawk Coach)

Just because nobody complains doesn't mean all parachutes are perfect. - Benny Hill

There's a limit to the usability problems you can document your way out of. Things beyond that are training problems.

If you can't describe it simply, you can't use it easily.

If it's very difficult to write about then it probably doesn't have quality usability. No you can't just explain it in the manual.

## Process

If you don't care about quality, you can meet any other requirement - Gerald M. Weinberg, "The Zeroth Law of Software Engineering"

You can use an eraser on the drafting table or a sledge hammer on the construction site. - Frank Lloyd Wright

No shortcuts today; I'm in a hurry. - Swiss saying

Planning is essential, but plans are useless - Dwight D. Eisenhower

Interface Design: "Design first and code later." Carpenter: "Measure twice and cut once."

Designing to Requirements and Walking on Water are Easy if Both are Frozen.

If you can't afford the time to do it right, how are you going to find the time to fix it up?

The chief cause of problems is solutions. - Eric Severeid

The only thing more expensive than hiring a professional, is hiring an amateur. – Red Adair

The sooner you start to code, the longer the program will take. - Roy Carlson

Rules are made for people we don't like.

New rules are made for people we REALLY don't like.

Brand new rules are for you.

Poor usability is often the result of a thousand cuts. - Greg Hoskins

Usability testing is the killing field of cherished notions. - David Orr

## Technology and Computers

If the automobile had followed the same development as the computer, a Rolls-Royce would today cost \$100, get a million miles per gallon, and explode once a year killing everyone inside. - Robert Cringely, InfoWorld

It is a far better to adapt the technology to the user than to force the user to adapt to the technology - Larry Marine

The fault is not in thyself, but in thy system.

To err is human, to really foul things up you need a computer - Paul Ehrlich

Coding is long. Design is short. Paper is cheap.

No system is so foolproof that it can't be brought to its knees by a well-intentioned novice.

The joy of an early release lasts but a short time. The bitterness of an unusable system lasts for years.

Cute is not a good adjective for systems.

The effects of technological stress are communicated through emotion exactly because the source of the problem is not technical but cognitive. - Frank Spillers

## Words to Live By

Since our problems have been our own creation, they also can be overcome. – George Harrison

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. - Albert Einstein

All the good ideas never lie under one hat - Dale Turner

We know very little, and most of what we know is wrong. - George Casaday

Don't ever take a fence down until you know why it was put up. - G.K. Chesterton

Eighty percent of success is showing up - Woody Allen

For every piece of durable nonsense, there is an irrelevant frame of reference in which it makes perfect sense.

If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got.

Let us think the unthinkable, let us do the undoable. Let us prepare to grapple with the ineffable itself, and see if we may not eff it after all.

Never attribute to malice what incompetence will explain. Sometimes you just need a bigger hammer. - G Casaday Sr

Supposing is good, but finding out is better. - Samuel Clemens

There is no free lunch. But sometimes if you eat a good breakfast, you won't need to spend as much money on lunch. - Cameron Hayne, CRIM, on cost justifying usability testing.

Truce is better than friction - Charles Herguth

You can learn at least one principle of user interface design by loading a dishwasher. If you crowd a lot in there, nothing gets very clean.

You can't prevent people from putting beans in their noses. But you shouldn't stuff beans in their noses. - Stan Schwartz

It's a jungle. Be careful out there.

Common sense is an uncommon commodity.

Everything in its place, and a place for everything.

## The Business of Usability

What does management think it wants? Ok, now how do we show them they're wrong? What does marketing think it wants? Ok, now how do we show them they're wrong?

I love my job ... Nobody should make money certifying me. - Danish usability professional

If you tell me just ONCE more that 'we aren't testing you, we're testing the application', I'll SCREAM!

We have our mouths full of users, but our practice is full of ourselves. – Marijke Rijsberman

If we build it, they will complain. - John (JR) Morris

To every action there is an equal and opposite criticism.

## Other quotes collections

Dey Alexander's Usability Quotes

IA Commonplace Book

## Credits

Contributors include: Andrei Herasimchuk, Arun, Beth Archibald, Carl Myhill, Caroline Jarrett, Cliff Anderson, Deborah Sova, Dick Miller, Douglas Anderson, George Casaday, Howard Tamler, Jon Meads, Ken Becker, Lisa Seaman, Polly Brown, Robin Kinkead, Rolf Molich, Rosemary Martinak, Samuel Saal, Shawn Zhang, Steve Slatcher, Sue Heim, Susie Robson, Suzanne Cole, Ted Briggs, Todd Zazelenchuk, William Hudson. Thanks to Cliff Anderson for the post that started it all.